# Más allá de los *Borderlands*:

# Anzaldúa, Spiritual Activism and Agents of Awakening

Kathryn Quinn-Sánchez

Georgian Court University, New Jersey, United States of America.

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**Abstract**

In her post-*Borderlands* work, Gloria Anzaldúa asks us to redefine society by opening our minds and senses to erase boundaries, borders and labels, to free ourselves from limitations and to be able to work towards social justice for everyone. This article follows the development of post-*Borderlands* thought by engaging with Anzaldúan terminology as "queer" work. The terms include: autohistoria-teoría, Coyolxauhqui, conocimiento, nepantla, nos/otras, spiritual activism and new tribalism. First, I delve into these terms' significance and how Anzaldúa and others view their impact on the field of Latina feminism and the goal of social change. Secondly, a discussion of how these concepts are represented, adopted and modified by other Latina writers ensues. Finally, we arrive at how recent Latina feminists engage with these concepts as their works demonstrate the immense reach of Anzaldúan thought. In closing, I choose to highlight a few nepantleras who have chosen to become "agents of awakening" by internalizing theory and externalizing their spirituality.

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> Self-education requires that we open all of our senses, not just our minds, and allow ourselves to be changed by the books and perspectives of other people. It requires that we unleash our passion for social justice.
>
> (Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa, "Transforming" 240)

In the opening quotation above, Gloria Anzaldúa asks us to redefine our entire society by opening our minds and senses in order to erase boundaries, borders and labels, to free ourselves from limitations and to be able to work towards social justice for everyone. What an incredible call to action! She teaches us to shed our binary thought patterns and adopt a spirituality that infuses us with passion for social change. Latina feminism has evolved into much more than a subversion of the dominant, privileged, heteronormative, French, male or homosexual, Anglo, white, female theoretical production. Rather, Latina feminism, with the aid of Anzaldúa as well as many others, has truly disrupted all categories by teaching us that we must not restrict ourselves to narrow perspectives; we must not reinforce pre-existing limitations of difference, or allow others to cage us into narrow spaces. Instead, Anzaldúa suggests that we embrace an ever

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developing, adopting, changing mode of thought while we expand our actions and hearts through rejecting the past and moving towards a "spirituality that not only transforms our perceptions of 'ordinary' life and our relationships with others, but also invites encounters with other realities, other worlds" (*Reader* 229).

This idea of opening to others, of disrupting binary thought and refusing to accept limitations is "queer" work. In typical Anzaldúan fashion, we cannot define "queer." If we were to do so, we delineate the concept through narrowing it rather than permitting it to demolish traditional, patriarchal ways of thinking and being, in addition to it rejecting what is considered dominant queer theory, which perceives the term "queer" through the reductive lens of gender. Towards the end of her life, Anzaldúa rejected all labels that stifled creativity and the spiritual unity of all beings. She understood that all of us are "queer" in the sense that we do not exist as static, rigid beings. This idea of "queer" opens queer theory to be more inclusive, more dynamic, more alive, as being "queer" cannot be pegged down to this or that definition, rather it is both, all, and neither, all at the same time.

Through an in-depth study of Anzaldúan thought within her post-Borderlands theoretical writings, we come to an understanding of what needs to happen to create a more just world. Indeed, post-*Borderlands* Anzaldúan thought can be read as a primer on spirituality and how individual spirituality influences our broader society. This idea is radically different from the usual discourse which disseminates the opposite perspective, that is to say, how society influences the individual and limits his/her behavior as a result. Through looking at her spiritual activism in detail, one arrives at the conclusion that Anzaldúa has continuously built upon her earlier theoretical perspectives. As she grew to understand that there is no "correct" way to write theory, Anzaldúa broadened her approach and with each passing year she began to think from her heart as much as from her mind, combining experience and theory while embracing an ever broader inclusivity. Through her work, we can view her process of "queering" praxis and theory through her attempts to open what academia (and our broader society) has always kept separate: our lives and academic theoretical discourse.

Specifically, how do we merge experience and theory? What is the first step? Anzaldúa shows us the way. She affirms: "Transformation does not happen unless we explore what threatens us as teachers and students; what we sweep under our desks; what we silence; what we're angry about; what causes us anxiety; what brings us into open conflict and disagreement; and what cultural prescriptions and cultural teachings we're rebelling against" (*Reader* 241). By being honest and facing reality in all aspects of our lives, we can implement social change. We must study and learn as much as possible about "the other." For example, we have to "nurture the ability to wear someone else's skin" (*Reader* 230). In addition, Anzaldúa attests: "Even though it may be the hardest thing we'll ever do, we have to come together, work with each other, learn about each other, listen to each other, value each other. We stand before the abyss between our worlds, psyching ourselves to leap. We have to use every means to transform ourselves and our society" (*Reader* 294). Although it may seem difficult, the solution is to

remove perceived distance between us and them, by erasing fictitious borders that close us off from each other.

This article follows the development of post-*Borderlands* Anzaldúan thought by engaging with Anzaldúan terminology as "queer" work. The terms include: autohistoria-teoría, Coyolxauhqui, conocimiento, nepantla, nos/otras, spiritual activism and new tribalism. First, I delve into these terms' significance and how Anzaldúa and others view their impact on the field of Latina feminism and the goal of social change. Secondly, a discussion of how these concepts are represented, adopted and modified by other Latina writers ensues. Finally, we arrive at how recent Latina feminists engage with these Anzaldúan concepts as their works demonstrate the immense reach of Anzaldúan thought across many lives and academic fields. In closing, I choose to highlight a few nepantleras who have chosen to become "agents of awakening" by internalizing theory and externalizing their spirituality. In other words, they have adopted Anzaldúa's terminology into their very lives—both personal and academic—by acting as nepantleras. They are showing us that we all have the capacity to change ourselves and our world peacefully and compassionately to one that is totally inclusive and just. Specific texts that will aid in this discussion include: *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002), *Entre Mundos/Among Worlds* (2005), *Telling to Live* (2001), *Canícula* (1995) and *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (2009).

Since history has excluded colonized women's voices, Emma Pérez has called for a "decolonial imaginary." Just like Anzaldúa, the historian Pérez states that to achieve this goal, Latinas need to develop new ways of writing stories to counter the dominant, patriarchal versions that have and continue to colonize us. The authors of *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002) begin this process by explaining how "[t]heory had become an essentialized category that inferred elite European male thinking" (349). Indeed, it was evident that the "[a]cademe devalues personal experience as a way of knowing while emphasizing the knowledge of 'high' theory as the only 'real' route toward making sense of the world" (Cervenak et al. 349). To start this decolonization, we must begin the process of unlearning the colonized mindset. The first step is to envision a new theoretical space.

## 1. A New Theoretical Space: Autohistoria Teoría

In the nineties, the early days of Latina feminism met with enormous resistance. Latina theory was rejected by mainstream academia on the basis that the work was simplistic and essentialist. In fact, contributions to Latina feminist theory were "often condemned as essentialist, escapist, naïve, or in other ways apolitical and backward thinking" (Keating, "I'm" 55). In order to self-define and refute conventional labeling and the limitations placed upon Latinas in the academy in particular, many Latina academics turned to hybrid genres such as combinations of autobiography with fiction or in Anzaldúan terms: autohistoria-teoría. Autohistoria-teoría, in the words of Frances Negrón-Muntaner, "merges genres and blurs the distinction between internal and external realities" and furthermore puts "the self in the text" (276). In other words, autohistoria-teoría represents a way to theorize about hybrid identities by

privileging life experience. However, the use of code-switching, a first-person autobiographical style and "being suspicious of the dominant cultures' interpretation of 'our' experiences" have resulted in Latinas being labeled as subversives, which caused tenure denials and/or being skipped over for positions of leadership (Anzaldúa, "Haciendo" xxv). Nonetheless, Latina theorists persevered and slowly gained access to classrooms through the adaption of less traditional syllabi. Moreover, in the summers between academic years, a group of Latinas began to meet and actively share their experiences with each other with the goal in mind of creating a new type of space, a space of community as well as a collection of testimonios that would contribute much to the burgeoning field of Latina feminism. This text would be titled *Telling to Live* (2001) and it would highlight both real people's lives and a new way to write theory.

At the outset, Ruth Behar and others were uncertain because they considered that Latina feminist writing was considered "too soft for the academy and too hard for our readers outside" (111). Meanwhile, Norma Klahn actively proclaimed the need to decolonize literary space by decentering Western European and Anglo canonical literature by writing counter-hegemonically, or through "queering" their research. One way to subvert the paradigm was to fuse lived experiences with theory—heterogeneous in content—and a variety of lived experiences would be shared and discussed with others. *Telling to Live* demonstrates both this process as well as the subversive outcomes to its readers. Each of the participatory academics learned to comprehend each other's unique identity as well as shed light on their individual and collective suffering as a step towards self-healing. Anzaldúa explains exactly why such emotional exchanges were necessary: "By redeeming your most painful experiences you transform them into something valuable, algo para compartir or share with others so they too may be empowered" ("Now" 540). Due to the emphasis on human stories, the reader identifies with the speakers on a human level. The depth of the emotions, such as learning about commonplace discrimination, fuels a political objective: revolutionary change. The first person narrative causes the reader to feel like a friend listening to a private talk. *Telling To Live* breaks the silence of suffering to empower and "give back to nature, los espíritus, and others a gift wrested from the events in [one's] life, a bridge home to the self" (Anzaldúa, "Now" 540). To give oneself the gift of authenticity is truly life-affirming and to share this process with others creates an immense bond of solidarity and interconnectivity.

*Telling to Live* and Norma E. Cantú's *Canícula* (1995) are both what Anzaldúa terms autohistoria-teoría. This terminology describes the act of telling one's life story while simultaneously theorizing. This blend of both narrative and theory refutes and denies the higher status category that theory has traditionally held and brings the text into the community in an attempt to show that real life is where theories are envisioned and enacted, or as Cantú (invoking Anzaldúa) proclaims: offers "work that matters." In response to Cherríe Moraga and Anzaldúa's initial call for Latina academics to reject the limits placed on their research in *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), many essays have been published that focus on a new type of theory, one that is based on real lives.

Cantú, one of the participants in the *Telling to Live* project, writes about experiencing a type of freedom "to write across genres, memories, languages, and the facts and fictions of her own life story" ("A escondidas" 109). Cantú's *Canícula* represents the making of theory through narrative where she outlines the importance of Latina theory as lived. The emphasis on everyday life rises to the surface rather than remain an abstraction, separate from life. The theoretical aspect stands out from the text's unique structure as well as from the textual Cantú-protagonist and meta-textual Cantú-author. While Cantú-protagonist symbolizes lived and *possibly* lived experiences, Cantú-author's selection of and placement of photos, collages, memories and narratives allows for a theorizing of Latina identity.[1] Through decentering the traditional, patriarchal bildungsroman that always focuses on a white male and his pursuit of adulthood, we can assess Cantú's work as an instance of "queering" the male, white, heterosexual, chronological, omniscient narrator. Sadly, this male-dominated genre, for its ubiquity, erroneously causes society to deem the masculine narrator to be normative.

Through autohistoria-teoría, major changes have already occurred in the field of Latina feminism. As forces for societal change, several Latinas continue to challenge how theory is created; indeed, they have begun to challenge History.[2] Pérez's "decolonial imaginary," like Anzaldúa's autohistoria-teoría, state that in order to decolonize, Latinas must develop innovative ways of writing stories to counter the dominant cultures' versions that have historically colonized our minds. *Telling to Live* and Cantú's *Canícula* are two efforts to decolonize us through subverting the traditional narrative and theoretical forms. Indeed, these works embody "a major cultural shift in …understanding of what knowledge consists of and how we come to know" (Anzaldúa, "Now" 541). By questioning what is worthy to be termed theory, Cantú and other Latina feminists began to rewrite history by recounting herstories, just a few steps taken in the long process of unshackling our colonial mindset.

**2. Coyolxauhqui, Desconocimiento and Conocimiento**

In *This Bridge We Call Home*, Anzaldúa writes of several steps that an individual follows to reach a state of freedom where she is energized to move herself and the planet towards spiritual activism. First, one must "encounter your shadow side and confront what you've programmed yourself (and have been programmed by your cultures) to avoid (desconocer), to confront the traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full use of your facultades" (540-41). It is these very habits that she calls desconocimiento, or ignorance, which is a "willful unawareness" or simply "blanking out reality and retreating into fantasies" (*This Bridge* 552). That is to say, we must fight the urge to rely on others, embrace the pain and intensity that accepting and learning from reality can bring to us in the form of creativity, self-understanding, and venture a leap in consciousness that results in seeing how self and the planet (universe) are

[1] See Kathryn Quinn-Sánchez's "Living Theory: Representing Lives in Norma E. Cantú's *Canícula*" (2011).
[2] See Juan E. De Castro's *Mestizo Nations* for an intriguing presentation on what he calls a "discourse of mestizaje" in Latin America.

connected. AnaLouise Keating emphasizes that the "interrelatedness of all life forms is a crucial component in Anzaldúa's theory of spiritual activism and facilitates the development of new tactics for survival, resistance, and transformation on all levels" ("I'm" 60). Similar to an ecosystem that relies on each member for a balanced existence, spiritual activism works towards erasing hierarchical separations and allows our hearts and minds to understand that we all belong to one ecosystem, that of the Earth. In other words, we all play an integral part to the planet's balance; we are all connected. We must realize simultaneously that in joining with others, we are allowing for "queering" to occur. Through erasing binary thought, working with everyone as equals, and seeing (like in the film *Avatar*) each other as spirits living in a physical form, we are rejecting and destabilizing the idea that physical differences matter.

Battling our own desconocimiento is imperative because intrinsically we have swallowed beliefs that reinforce Henri Lefebvre's characterization of society in terms of space and its inherent use of violent means to maintain the status quo.[3] In Anzaldúa's words: "This system and its hierarchies impact people's lives in concrete and devastating ways and justify a sliding scale of human worth used to keep humankind divided" ("Now" 541). Furthermore, Keating explains: "These tainted categories restrict our imaginations and thus limit our visions of social change" ("I'm" 64). Since we are accustomed to seeing the world with structural hierarchies based on race, gender, religion, sexual preference, we are not able to see clearly; these cages limit our ability to envision a new world. Hence, we must work through our own prejudices first and shed them from our psyches in order to model this way of thinking for others. Anzaldúa explains further: "Breaking out of your mental and emotional prison and deepening the range of perception enables you to link inner reflection and vision—the mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, and subtle bodily awareness—with social, political action and lived experiences to generate subversive knowledges" ("Now" 542). Rejecting what we have been taught and come to accept as normal is imperative to the process of desconocimiento. Since there is so much to be deconstructed before the re-creation of knowledges can occur, Anzaldúa chooses the Aztec goddess Coyolxauhqui as the symbol of desconocimiento. Similar to Eve, Coyolxauhqui entertained a novel idea to subvert her family and was punished in retribution; she was decapitated and dismembered by her newly born brother, Huitzilopochtli, the god of war. In Aztec tradition, Coyolxauhqui survives as the moon. Anzaldúa suggests that in order to be reborn like Coyolxauhqui, humanity must pass through a painful process of dismemberment to reorganize our thinking to include more mindful and less judgmental perspectives. This goddess serves as "[our] symbol for both the process of emotional psychic dismemberment, splitting body/mind/spirit/soul, and the creative work of putting all the pieces together in a new form, a partially unconscious work done in the night by the light of the moon, a labor or re-visioning and re-membering" ("Now" 546). To put ourselves back together in such a way that *we are our own authors, definers, labelers, and creators* allows us enormous freedom from external forces that

[3] See Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*.

would choose to limit us in any way. Yet, there are many stages to reinventing one's self and many layers to re-imagine; it is by no means a simple or a straightforward process.

We begin with ourselves, at night and alone. Anzaldúa recounts much of her personal experience when she challenged herself repeatedly to remain authentic in her search for selfhood. The goal of setting oneself free, when fighting diabetes simultaneously, took enormous focus and strength on the part of Anzaldúa. First one must recognize what is real in order to take advantage of her own power in every situation. Anzaldúa asserts: "You can't change the reality, but you can change your attitude toward it, your interpretation of it" (*Reader* 552). Moreover, Inés Hernández-Avila adds: "Gloria says in the first edition of *This Bridge* [that] self-autonomy is the key to autonomy as peoples, as communities, and as communities in solidarity. How is a people, a community, free? When each individual realizes freedom from within, and thereby recognizes everyone else's right to it" (535). To achieve this freedom, we have to comprehend that much of what we have been taught by our official histories must be unlearned. Hernández-Avila continues by pointing out that: "No matter what color, culture, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, nationality, religious/spiritual, economic, political persuasion (or not), we must talk more from the heart, with our own selves first, then with others" (535). This is the process of gaining conocimiento, or understanding. The space that one enters into to gain conocimiento in Anzaldúan terms is called nepantla. This term will be discussed in detail further on in the article. Here our discussion focuses on how Coyolxauhqui as symbol of dismemberment serves the individual to deconstruct and reconstruct the self and the self's understanding of his/her role and relationship to the broader world. While studying one's self, "You scrutinize and question the dominant and ethnic ideologies and the mind-sets their cultures induce in others. And, putting all the pieces together, you re-envision the map of the known world, creating a new description of reality and scripting a new story" (Anzaldúa, "Now" 545). For example, in *Telling to Live*, the participants and the process of telling stories, first to each other that would later be written, allowed for an unlearning process to occur, a process akin to Coyolxauhqui's dismemberment. This process was by all means necessary because although the group consisted of Latina academics they were by no means homogenous and hence each had acquired prejudices and stereotypes about each other's identities which had to be dismantled at the outset of the project.

Once free from the stereotypes, we realize that we are part of "a shift [away] from the kinds of knowledge [that are] valued now to the kinds that will be desired in the twenty-first century, a shift away from knowledge contributing both to military and corporate technologies and the colonization of our lives by TV and the Internet, to the inner exploration of the meaning and purpose of life" (Anzaldúa, "Now" 541). This inner exploration can be "attribute[d] … to the feminization of knowledge, one beyond the subject-object divide, a way of knowing and acting on ese saber you call conocimiento" ("Now" 541). Once engaged with true conocimiento we have entered into another new space, the space of nepantla.

**3. The Space of Nepantla: Where Transformation Occurs**

After entering nepantla, one begins to question the traditional and, hence, dated categories or classifications: "The binaries of colored/white, female/male, mind/body are collapsing. Living in nepantla, the overlapping space between different perceptions and belief systems, you are aware of the changeability of racial, gender, sexual, and other categories rendering the conventional labelings obsolete" (Anzaldúa, "Now" 541). One comes to know that although these labeling systems have at one point defined one's identity, there is a shift in understanding that these labels come from outside oneself and are only temporary in nature. Furthermore, these labels change depending on the historical time period and the culture in which they have been created. Hence, in nepantla, one sees the arbitrariness of labels and how they serve to maintain the status quo for those in power. Indeed, Anzaldúa writes of our lack of understanding in our own roles in maintaining current societal structures: "We are collectively conditioned not to know that every comfort of our lives is acquired with the blood of conquered, subjugated, enslaved, or exterminated people, an exploitation that continues today" ("Now" 541). By invoking the comforts of a middle or upper class lifestyle, Anzaldúa refers to social classes and hierarchies that societies construct to limit access depending on one's social location. In fact, space literally encloses the powerful and the wealthy in separate locations to reinforce these systems, structures and ideologies in order to maintain the status quo.

The complexity of dismantling such a society is truly vast. Indeed, how does one consider her relationship to the system that not only labels oneself, but also others? How does one come to a place of safety or freedom from exploitation or from exploiting others when the system is thusly structured? According to Anzaldúa, one must enter the space of nepantla, because

> Nepantla is the site of transformation, the place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas, tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures. Nepantla is the zone between changes where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it. ("Now" 548-49)

This struggle is a battle for what you have come to know, and you are letting it all go through "queering" yourself and starting from scratch. Letting go means not holding on to any part of your identity. In other words: "You begin to see race as an experience of reality from a particular perspective and a specific time and place (history), not as a fixed feature of personality or identity" ("Now" 549). One comes to realize that there is nothing permanent or fixed about identity markers; that through "queering" one can embrace another as an equal no matter how one previously perceived him/her. Anzaldúa affirms:

> In nepantla, you are exposed, open to other perspectives, more readily able to access knowledge derived from inner feelings, imaginal states, and outer events, and to "see through" them with a mindful, holistic awareness. Seeing through human acts both individual

> and collective allows you to examine the ways you construct knowledge, and reality, and explore how some of your/others' constructions violate other people's ways of knowing and living. ("Now" 544)

Therefore, not only does one see how labels limit oneself but also how the process of labeling limits our own ability to allow others to be themselves without imposing labels, limits, judgments or expectations due to how we perceive their identity from external markers. What is happening in the space of nepantla? There are two steps: first, the perspective becomes broader, we can see as if we were an owl—looking in all directions at once. Looking forward, I know that I will not accept external labels, yet looking back, I ask myself how many times I have employed a label on a fellow human being in an attempt to cage his/her identity into what *I* see. This is a major step towards healing! When we can accept our own flaws and begin to correct them, we progress towards putting not only our own Coyolxauhqui together, but the entire humanity's Coyolxauhqui can be put together compassionately.

**4. Spiritual Activism and Nos/Otras: We Are All One**

In the space of nepantla, the individual comes to the realization that the very concept of labeling and limiting is rather false and quite unnecessary because humanity consists of more than just physical bodies. Anzaldúa mentions this when she asserts: "Your identity has roots you share with all people and other beings—spirit, feeling, and body make up a greater identity category" ("Now" 560). Here is where Anzaldúa's concepts of nepantla and spiritual activism converge. She diverges completely from common academic practice and tells us openly that her autohistoria-teoría includes a "knowing [that] prompts you to shift into a new perception of yourself and the world. Nothing is fixed. The pulse of existence, the heart of the universe is fluid. Identity, like a river, is always changing, always in transition, always in nepantla" ("Now" 556). While invoking the unfixed nature of the universe, Anzaldúa demonstrates the fluidity of identity, the "queering" of the self. What is never changing is the aspect of our humanity we call spirit. She writes: "You become reacquainted with a reality called spirit, a presence, force, power, and energy within and without" ("Now" 558). Once an individual reclaims his/her spiritual nature, then a broader connection is made with the entire planet. There is no need for labels that cause separation or distance between us. She proclaims: "You share a category of identity wider than any social position or racial label. This conocimiento motivates you to work actively to see that no harm comes to people, animals, ocean—to take up spiritual activism and the work of healing" ("Now" 558). Through one's spirit, a human being recognizes that all living beings are part of a larger whole, and that as such, we are all intertwined, and a caring as well as a responsibility for each other's wellbeing ensues. Within Anzaldúa's spiritual activism and the work of healing, the symbol of Coyolxauhqui expands to incorporate every living entity on the planet. The healing of merely one individual human being is no longer satisfactory because one begins to understand herself as one cell of a larger being: the planet. This inclusion overarches any imaginable limit when one comprehends that we must all be healed for our planet to also

heal. Everyone and every living thing becomes an extension to one's spirit identity. No one individual person, country, region or hemisphere takes precedence over another. Rather one comes to the realization that the entire planet reflects our state of health just as our health reflects hers. In speaking about the gifts of the nepantleras and their role in expanding spiritual activism, Anzaldúa declares: "They possess the gift of vision. Nepantleras think in terms of the planet, not just their own racial group, the U.S., or Norte América. They serve as agents of awakening, inspir[ing] and challeng[ing] others to deeper awareness, greater conocimiento; they serve as reminders of each other's search for wholeness of being" (*Reader* 293). Singular labels that refer to one's skin color, ethnicity, sexuality, or religious preference are superseded by oneness and a relationship of interconnectivity between all beings.

Grasping the larger, broader reality that we are all one and that we are all connected "empowers you to shift perceptions, te capacita a sonar otros modos of conducting your life, revise the scripts of your various identities, and use these new narratives to intervene in the cultures' existing dehumanizing stories" (Anzaldúa, "Now" 559). Moreover, "You're sure of one thing...we need a more expansive conocimiento. The new stories must partially come from outside the system of ruling powers" ("Now" 560). To bring about the unlearning that must first take place, the nepantleras first channel their skills to help us avoid the pitfalls of falling back upon the past labels from which we struggle to unbind ourselves and our minds. Anzaldúa affirms las nepantleras' skills: "Las nepantleras, like the ancient chamanas, move between the worlds. They can work from multiple locations, can circumvent polarizing binaries. They try not to get locked into one perspective or perception of things" (*Reader* 293). With the nepantleras' aid, "you shift realities, develop an ethical, compassionate strategy with which to negotiate conflict and difference within self and between others, and find common ground by forming holistic alliances. You include these practices in your daily life, act on your vision—enacting spiritual activism" ("Now" 545). By listening compassionately, nepantleras show a deep respect for others which expands the healing of all, in turn creating optimum conditions for solidarity and coalitions to work toward change.

Shifting towards spiritual activism as individuals, groups and as a planet will take time. Indeed, we have just embarked on this journey and we still suffer from the limits that we have inherited from our cultures. For example, Anzaldúa writes nos/otras with a clear separation to make visible the disconnections that still exist between groups. She points out: "The us/them dichotomy locks us into a who-is-more-oppressed dynamic. Internalized racism and internalized shame get played out. We all re-enact the colonialism and marginalization the dominant culture practices on Natives and people of color" (*Reader* 284). Anzaldúa suggests that we move past these discursive traps that mire us once again into a restricted mindset and we must "queer" ourselves. She understands that:

> In "nos/otras," the "us" is divided in two, the slash in the middle representing the bridge—the best mutuality we can hope for at the moment. [However, l]as nepantleras can envision a time when the bridge will no longer be needed—we'll have shifted to a seamless nosotras.

> This move requires a different way of thinking and relating to others; it requires that we act on our interconnectivity. ("Now" 570)

Presently, we remain divided based on our variable identity markers and postcolonial histories. Yet, there will be a time when we arrive at a new space where we will be able to put those markers aside, both those we use for ourselves as well as those we impose on others. For when we remain inside these labels, we enclose ourselves into limiting our creativity, and hence solutions seem distant or impossible. Keating agrees on this point: "When we structure our teaching, our politics, or, more generally, our lives according to this dualistic sameness/difference framework, we assume that there is only one right way to think, act, theorize, or self-define" ("I'm" 65). Anzaldúa calls us to refrain from such binary thought, open our hearts and truly listen to one another. This is how we can heal ourselves and each other. This is the way forward to a new tribalism.

**5. New Tribalism and Anzaldúa's Legacy**

If we accept Anzaldúa's call to social action, there is much to be done. Like all spiritual thought leaders, Anzaldúa's work is left unfinished. That is to say, she calls us to continue along the path of conocimiento to become nepantleras, to become agents of awakening, to share with the world what we have learned from the powerful Anzaldúan autohistoria-teoría. She asks us to work towards developing "an awareness of the interconnectedness of people and nature and all things, an awareness that people were part of nature and not separate from it" (*Reader* 282). In her lifetime, she successfully declassified herself and the nepantleras from past labels by theorizing a new, broader, spiritual identity. She asserts:

> I use the term "new tribalism" to formulate a more inclusive identity, one that's based on many features and not solely on race. In order to maintain its privileges the dominant culture has imposed identities through racial and ethnic classification. The new tribalism disrupts this imposition by challenging those categories. The new tribalism is a social identity that could motivate subordinated communities to work together in coalition. (*Reader* 283)

In fact, there are many who have joined Anzaldúa's tribe of inclusion. To mention Carrie McMaster, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Amala Levine, Norma E. Cantú and Caren S. Neile, I name just a few who have written of the importance of Anzaldúa's work in their own autohistoria-teorías.

In *EntreMundos/AmongWorlds*, Caren S. Neile's piece includes creative works that celebrate Anzaldúa's visit to Florida Atlantic University during the spring semester of 2001. Neile invokes every one of the terms that this article discusses showing how Anzaldúa's work continues to transcend time and space while rippling outward first small and then with larger, more profound shifts in thought. Indeed, the students that took class with Anzaldúa showered her in gratitude by

saying "Know that you have friends here who think of you often. Who strive to nurture the pieces you left behind" (Neile 27). It is through dissecting one's pieces for understanding and then rebuilding oneself that Coyolxauhqui stands for the process of conocimiento.

Another example that refers to the impact of Anzaldúan thought has to do with the significance of queer studies. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains that Anzaldúa's theories have expanded the use of the term queer substantially:

> A lot of the most exciting recent work around "queer" spins the term outward along dimensions that can't be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality crisscross with these *and other* identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses, for example…Gloria Anzaldúa us[es] the leverage of "queer" to do a new kind of justice to the fractal intricacies of language, skin, migration, state. (8-9)

This quote unpacks the term "queer" and expands its meaning to incorporate all aspects of hybridity. In other words, "queer" does not limit, but rather it includes. "Queer" opens all doors, all ways of being through celebrating radical difference. There is no necessity to limit the term within the category of gender or sexuality, but rather it takes on a larger, broader, more encompassing significance to incorporate the several layers that one's identity may traverse in any given contact zone.

Norma E. Cantú discusses how spiritual activism and the work of healing has entered into her own life as well as the lives of world-wide feminists in "Doing Work That Matters: Gloria Anzaldúa in the International Arena," an article published by *Signs* in 2011. Cantú brings Anzaldúan thought into present day politics by asking global feminists the following question: "What are we feminist scholars in the twenty-first century to do with the global violence against women?" ("Doing" 2). She challenges us to act as Anzaldúa would: "Anzaldúa asks that we not see the other as alien, or outside ourselves, but that we see everyone and everything as an extension of ourselves" ("Doing" 2). The El Mundo Zurdo International Society has a conference every eighteen months to continue Anzaldúa's work. The scholars share their autohistoria-teorías in this space where they all speak the "Anzaldúan language" ("Doing" 3). Cantú invokes Anzaldúa and Keating, as her global colleagues do, to further the rights of women, lesbians and gays, as well as all marginalized peoples to "expose, challenge, and work to transform unjust social structures" (Keating, "I'm" 57). More feminists understand that as long as the society remains unjust, *we are a threat.* Indeed, around the world there are wars and terrorists who are fearful of losing their privileged role in society. That is to say, simply by being born male and heterosexual, many receive more opportunities throughout their lives and when women are given an opportunity to thrive, groups such as the Taliban balk at the change due to their fear of losing power against what they perceive to be their inherent rights as men. Women know this. Gays know this. Women and gays experience this every minute of their lives. However, we have reached critical mass as more and more of us are educated, and we are helping our straight and

lesbian sisters and gay brothers globally to become educated. Consequently, we have become thinking subjects. No longer are we mere objects to be possessed or abused by the privileged, masculine, heterosexual population on the planet. Working towards understanding in a non-threatening way combines self-reflection and self-growth with outwardly directed compassionate acts that are designed to bring about social change (Keating, "I'm" 64).

Furthermore, Amala Levine takes on how spirituality does not remove the importance of the body in identity politics but rather expands it through symbiosis:

> Anzaldúa's philosophical underpinnings do not make the body an abstraction but rather point to its spiritual permeability. Her ailments remain just as excruciatingly painful, and cultural/ethnic stigmatization do not lose their sting, even though, when viewed through the prism of a deeper consciousness, they appear as crucibles in the path of transformation." (175)

The human body remains intrinsic to one's experience and the limits of our bodies can push us to travel inwards. By learning that we are more than bodies, we realize that perseverance is born in the human spirit. It is our spirit that gives us our strength; it is what unites all of us.

To highlight the role of the mind as separate from spirit, Levine adds: "Although analytic, linear thought has produced spectacular results, these results have come at a high price, including the underutilization of the right brain, delegitimization of subjective experience, and suspicion of spiritual cognizance outside institutional pathways" (179). The above quote undercuts Descartes' proclamation "I think therefore I am" and hence much of our Western way of understanding the world. Sadly, when we go beyond the mind in academic circles, we are deemed illegitimate or alternative, such as in the case of the fields of indigenous medicine or lived theory production.[4] Anzaldúa, and other Latina feminists, ask us to choose conocimiento as one way to accept that both right and left brain knowledges are legitimate. Levine writes: "Conocimiento is the lived expression of nonduality as spiritually grounded intersubjectivity, social equality, and political solidarity" (182). She continues: "This perceptual transformation has very real political and ethical consequences. The recognition of a shared spiritual base and modes of consciousness defuses the hostility latent in any oppositional confrontation, replacing power struggle and hierarchy with the bond of empathy" (182). In essence, through recognizing one another as a spirit being in a physical body for a limited time, we realize that anger or disillusionment only derail our goal. When we understand each other better, we empathize with another's pain or suffering and desire their return to health. This, in turn, can actually help each of us as well due to the understanding that there is no separation between spiritual beings. When we aid each other, we also aid ourselves and every living being.

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[4] For an in depth discussion of the role of traditional definitions of theory and its limitations concerning Latina feminist theory, please see Chapter Seven of Kathryn Quinn-Sánchez's *Identity in Latin American and Latina Literature: The Struggle to Self-Define in a Global Era Where Space, Capitalism, and Power Rule.*

When we label each other for the purpose of improving everyone's lives, life becomes simpler. One chooses love over fear and this creates a "shift toward a spiritually/ontologically undergirded experience of nonduality [that] prepares the ground for an ethic of care predicated on trust, respect, responsibility, and love—not as fusion but as the recognition of I and Thou, plural bodies yet kindred spirits" (Levine 182). In addition, "This realization also creates the basis for the formation of alliances, solidarity movements, contingent communities: temporary, fluid arrangements to empower the marginalized. They are built across social, economic, cultural, racial/ethnic, or gender differences by those with a shared awareness as nos/otras" (Levine 183). By joining with those who have become nepantleras, the movement for social change grows ever more powerful, labels that limit fall by the wayside, and more hearts are lifted by a sense of spiritual freedom resulting in opportunities for growth in all areas of our lives.

The final example is represented in Carrie McMaster's essay "Negotiating Paradoxical Spaces," an essay that espouses how feminist disabilities studies would benefit when merged with Anzaldúan thought. McMaster points out:

> Anzaldúa's ability to draw non-homogenizing parallels between …. identities illustrates a type of empathic identification with significant implications for social justice work. Anzaldúa enacts a type of cross-difference identification, arguing that persons who experience any type of oppression are capable of empathizing with *differently* oppressed persons. Such empathetic identification can serve at least three purposes: allowing us to identify with and acknowledge kindred spirits who aren't members of our chosen political identity group(s); encouraging us to form temporary or permanent alliances with these other Others; and providing us with both rational and emotional grounds for opposing their oppression as we oppose our own. (103)

Anzaldúa's theories and model teach all of us to reach across society's imaginary boundaries to come together. An example of this is explained by McMaster as she writes how being disabled creates the opportunity for conocimiento:

> Because U.S. society puts very strong emphasis on being "normal" or "average," we are torn between feeling alienated from our culture or alienated from ourselves. This conflict throws us into nepantla. If we are to thrive, we must hold the paradox of who we are versus who we are supposed to be until we can arrive at conocimiento and become able to act on our own behalf, on behalf of all persons with disabilities, and indeed, on behalf of all people. (104)

Following Anzaldúa, McMaster draws strength from her conocimiento, creating ripe conditions for becoming a nepantlera that serve herself, other disabled people and ultimately all people. Spiritual growth and the breaking down of perceived barriers, limits or labels can be one of the ways that disabled people can heal themselves and society simultaneously. In speaking

about conocimiento from the perspective of a disabled person, McMaster writes "this form of knowledge permits us to go beyond what we might incorrectly believe are the limits upon reality" (104). It is these limits that society imposes and tries to enforce, although, as McMaster points out, many times these limits are simply false. One way that would improve our lives, for all of society, involves abled-bodied people to respect those that have disabilities. Indeed, these people would be able to teach and model "reconciliation from different points of view, altering our existing points of view, and/or resolving conflicts extremely well" (McMaster 105). By involving disability studies with feminism, Anzaldúa and McMaster inform us that when working together to erase our incorrect perceptions, we can create a more just society, while the only thing holding us back is our minds. We must reject the perception of reality that privileges able-bodied individuals over those that society perceives as disabled. This perception supports a system that imposes a false hierarchy; it is this hierarchy which must be disabled within our hearts and minds to allow us to build a reality that is just for all members.

The process of unlearning hierarchical thought and replacing it with an openness that espouses Anzaldúan thought requires a commitment to continued dialogue with others, a fierce ability to let go of past labels, passionate energy to share one's autohistoria-teoría and the compassion of a nepantlera. Anzaldúa shows us how individual spirituality can greatly impact our lives, as well as the lives of those around us, and finally, by extension, how the entire planet receives benefit from our spiritual growth. Setting ourselves free from imposed labels will result in a freer, more just society. Indeed, "the goal of spirituality is to transform one's life" (*Reader* 289). Throughout her career as a Latina feminist, Anzaldúa put forward theories that have expanded ever more broadly, reaching an inclusivity that incorporates every living being. To follow her lead, we must first engage with our own minds to dismantle the labels that limit us. With the path of conocimiento and the symbol of Coyolxauhqui, we have the tools to continue our spiritual development. Through recognizing what derails the process, we can progress towards spiritual activism and become nepantleras, or agents of awakening. There is much "queering" to be done, so let us not lose momentum but strive towards a better society by joining Anzaldúa's tribe consciously. By choosing to value every living being we are healing ourselves and our planet. By choosing peace over hate, we are growing spiritually. By choosing love over fear, we unlearn the official histories that have colonized us for too long. By embracing spiritual activism, we set each other free.

To redefine society based on a spirituality of total inclusion is an awesome objective. Anzaldúa has shown us the path of conocimiento. Of utter import is sharing the process, sharing our lives, our autohistoria-teorías, because this subversive act gives permission to other Others to do the same. This sharing sparks further creativity and further progress: "An exchange of energy is what the process of creation is all about" (*Reader* 292). As more energy is exchanged, we feed each other's spirits with love, joy and peace. In fact, Anzaldúa has asserted that "The work will pass on this energy to the reader or viewer and feed her or his soul" (*Reader* 292). By sharing and listening to each other we affirm and value our uniqueness; we show that we care and are empathic. By engaging as human spirits, we will radically change ourselves, our minds, our

thoughts and our lives. We will demand and display as much compassion and love for others as we do for ourselves.

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